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SHORT STRICTURES

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Mr. JENYNS'S VIEW, &c.

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Theology vol 112.

SHORT STRICTURES

ON

CERTAIN PASSAGES

IN

A VIEW

OF THE

Internal Evidence of the Christian Religion,

By SOAME JENYNS, Esq.

Written by a L A Y M A N. *K*

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SHORT STORIES

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TO THE

R E A D E R.

THESE Remarks were written immediately upon reading Mr. Jenyns's View some months

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after

after its publication. The
Writer since finds, that some
of them coincide with the sen-
timents in other answers to the
same book; and in one or two
instances he observes too a simi-
lar turn of expression. He
thinks, however, that there is
a sufficient diversity, even in
these passages, to justify the
appearance of this pamphlet,
2 which

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which has other parts peculiarly its own.

STRICT.

STRICTURES

ON

Mr. JENYNS'S VIEW, &c.

MANY are the writers, who have ventured to give us their sentiments on the Christian Religion;—so many, that the attention of the Public is not now easily excited towards any thing of the kind. This I imagine to be a truth well-known to Mr. Jenyns; and that accordingly he thought it necessary to treat his subject in a very new and extraordinary

B dinary

dinary manner, in order to induce any body to read. That his book is in divers respects both new and extraordinary, is not only visible to his readers, but freely acknowledged by himself: yet one particularity, not the least of those contained in it, he seems hardly sensible of; I mean, an ambiguous kind of style very ill-adapted to the serious province he has there undertaken. However, I should not have thought it worth while to have animadverted on the style alone, had there been no material objection to the assertions which it conveys. Some of those, being merely religious, are fitter to be examined by those persons, whose study and profession have more peculiarly qualified

qualified them for the task: there are others, which cannot but be disgusting to every rational being, conscious of a moral sense, and of an active principle of benevolence. These last are the assertions, which are intended here chiefly to be considered.

Mr. Jenyns says, that " Valour, Patriotism, and Friendship, are in fact no virtues at all *:" which he endeavours to prove by his own definitions of each. Valour he defines by calling it " active courage — the usual perpetrator of all violence † — the ferocity of a savage ‡." I would ask, in what

* P. 51, 52.

† P. 53.

‡ P. 57.

system of ethics valour so defined holds the place of a moral virtue? If in none, our author's assertion is totally idle. To say, *this* valour has been generally "celebrated and admired *," is saying just nothing at all; for even the vulgar in their admiration distinguish between *great* and *good*. But the valour universally esteemed as a moral virtue is synonymous to *fortitude*—a word "most judiciously omitted" by our author; since it implies both active and passive resolution, always exerted in a righteous cause, and to some salutary end. Must then this *cardinal* virtue be degraded by an arbitrary definition into the mere neutral quality of

* P. 51.

courage,

courage, and courage into cruelty?
 Such arguments deserve no other answer, than the words of Isaiah:
*Wo unto them that call evil good, and
 good evil; that put darkness for light,
 and light for darkness; that put bitter
 for sweet, and sweet for bitter.*

Patriotism (we are told) “ commands us to oppress all other
 “ countries to advance the imaginary
 “ prosperity of our own *.” I know
 not whence our author has conceived
 this idea of patriotism. The true
 patriot certainly wishes to advance
 the prosperity of his country; but is
 very far from thinking, that, in order
 to compass that end, he is excusable

* P. 59.

in becoming an instrument of oppression. The impartial Public always make a wide difference between justice and policy, patriot and statesman: they look for unblemished morality in the character of a patriot; and refuse confirming the title to the profligate and unprincipled, though it may have been erroneously bestowed by a temporary madness in the dregs of the people. The Patriot, properly described, is a benevolent man, endeavouring to benefit society in as large a sphere as his station will permit him to act in. And here I would put our author in mind, that
 “ those great masters of reason and
 “ erudition, Grotius, Locke, Addison, and Lyttelton, who firmly ad-
 “ hered

“hered to their belief of Christia-
 “nity after the most diligent and
 “learned researches,” were remark-
 “able for patriotism: “and from
 “hence *he* ought surely to conclude,
 “that it may be at least as possible
 “for him, as for them, to be mista-
 “ken *.”

Friendship is defined by our author
 in so vague and indeterminate a man-
 ner, that he appears very ill-qualified
 to pronounce, whether it is a virtue
 or not. He makes it to shift its es-
 sence according to the motives it pro-
 ceeds from, and the persons who cul-
 tivate it: whereas no system of ethics
 allows the name of friendship to “par-

* P. 187.

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“ticipation

"ticipation of vices *," or combination of interests; or deems it any other quality, than the purest affection of the heart—an affection not the less meritorious for being itself a most agreeable sensation. Friendship, like Patriotism, is nothing else but a mode of exercising benevolence; by no means "appropriating it to a single object †," rather forming the mind to an habitual charity. David likens it *to the precious ointment upon the head that ran down unto Aaron's beard, and* (completing the symbol) *went down to the skirts of his clothing ‡.* And Pope, in a comprehensive couplet, assigns a cause for this gradation of amity—

* P. 61. † P. 60. ‡ Pf. 133.

God loves from whole to parts : but human soul
Must rise from individual to the whole *.

Perhaps it may seem strange, that a writer, who professes himself to be no "beggar †" (by which I suppose he means, that he has not promulged these extraordinary sentiments with intention to make a property of the curiosity of the Public;) that such a writer should be guilty of perverting known terms from their meanings hitherto received. I can see no reason, indeed, why he should desire to impose upon his readers; but I can readily imagine, that he may be deceived himself. There is a pedantry of the *world*, as well as of the *cloyster*; and those who live continually

* Pope's Essay on Man. † P. 189.

in either, are too often infected with it. The all-licensed humours of various characters in public life, and the fluctuating fashions of conversation, frequently introduce confusion and uncertainty into men's ideas; from which ideas when *worldly pedants* give us their sentiments in writing, it is no wonder if they advance many things utterly irreconcilable with the established notions of mankind. They are extremely cautious of offending their fastidious brethren by methodical dulness, or too slavish an observance of antient authorities: *bigots*, nevertheless, to their own wild irregularities, to the unwritten, unstable, indigested authority of moderns. Thus we see vulgar errors, and the weaknesses, the

the prejudices, and the whims, of particular sets of men, substituted in the place of undeniable maxims and principles: and thus the Republic of Letters is stuffed with those paradoxical rants—*The Fable of the Bees*, an *Essay on Sublime and Beautiful*, and a *Free Inquiry into the Nature and Origin of Evil* *. The novelty of such productions may amuse for a moment, like extempore fallies of

* The First of these was answered by Professor Hutcheson, in three Letters to the Publisher of the Dublin Journal; and the Answer was printed again in 1750. Lord Kaimes, in his Elements of Criticism, has cleared away the sandy foundations of the Second. The Rev. Mr. Richard Shepherd favoured the Public with a complete Review of the last.

wit ; but, when submitted to a serious perusal, will rarely abide the test of those antiquated guides — Reason and Reflection.

The *words* Valour, Patriotism, Friendship, being restored to their usual signification, the qualities thereby denoted may demand their pristine rank among real virtues : if real virtues, they are certainly not “ incompatible with the genius and “ spirit of the Christian institution*.” Was it not going beyond my province, I should say, that they were all actually recommended in the Gospel :—but this subject has al-

* P. 52.

ready been discussed (as to the two last) by an eminent dissenting teacher*; so that I shall refer the reader to *his* excellent discourse, and proceed with cursory remarks upon the *View*.

I do not mean to combat every thing which Mr. Jenyns has advanced: I think many of his arguments extremely ingenious, and that they might be equally convincing, if separated from the rest of his book: but, as the phantom now stalks forth, with all its imperfections on its head, it seems much more likely to scare away than to allure its spectators. For this reason I could wish to expunge those immoral doctrines al-

* Foster.

ready examined, and also every other passage that can tend to lessen the confidence of his disciples in their new preceptor. It might have been more advisable in a friend to Christianity, to have defended and enforced its precepts, without an over-diligence in collecting all the doubts and difficulties which have at any time been raised about it; without raking together, not only the more common objections to our religion, but even each whimsical idea that can be supposed to enter into the most sceptical imagination; in short, without making his book a greater repository of arguments against faith, than are all the previous writings of infidels. It might

might have been more consonant to Christian charity, not to have denounced against any man so positive an exclusion * from the kingdom of Heaven. And there might have been an easier way of leading men to the knowledge of their duty, than puzzling them with contradictions. For is it not a contradiction to say, that “ shewing all the books of the “ Bible not to be written by their “ pretended authors, but posterior “ impositions, would prove nothing “ against the revelation contained in “ them † ?” and that “ had this re- “ velation been less incomprehen- “ sible, it would certainly have been

* P. 76, 78.

† P. 132.

“ more

“ more incredible * ? ” These contradictions, comprised in single sentences, manifest themselves at sight ; but whoever will be at the pains of comparing distant passages, will discover many more. Our author says, that human beings “ have neither
 “ ideas to comprehend, nor language
 “ to express, the designs of Providence, and the mysteries of his
 “ dispensations † .” Yet the same author pretends to describe “ the operations of our passions and vices in
 “ another state ‡ ;” in which state too he holds it impossible, they should meet with any objects || to operate upon. He tells us, that “ an uni-

* P. 180. † P. 19. ‡ P. 76. || P. 78.

“ versal

"verfal acceptance of the offer of
 "falvation could never have been
 "any part of the design *" of the
 Almighty, whose purpose it was only
 "to select the moft meritorious to
 "be fucceffively transplanted into
 "the kingdom of Heaven †." The
 prefumption of thus explaining and
 revealing the defigns of Providence,
 agrees but ill with that prior declara-
 tion of human infufficiency. An in-
 genious and very probable folution of
 a feeming difficulty, in which mo-
 defty and humility require our ac-
 quiefcence, fhould not have been
 deferted fo precipitately, for the
 fake of unfupported chimeras; efpe-
 cially when fome of thofe chimerical

* P. 144.

† P. 142.

suggestions would most effectually militate against the internal evidence of the Christian Religion.

The extravagance of these, or similar passages, was so conspicuous to the author himself, that he thought it necessary to make a solemn asseveration of his being neither enthusiast, methodist, beggar, nor madman*. Indeed, he does not appear steady enough for an enthusiast: his easy notion of faith, and of the little necessity of inspiration in the sacred writings, may acquit him of methodism: his own word may be taken that he is not a beggar: but, who

* P. 189.

ever believed a man to be *in his senses* only for his saying so? "The world is frantic," says the madwoman in Shenstone's Elegies; yet Shenstone certainly intended to give us the picture of a *madwoman*; and Mr. Jenyns has given us his own. It looks very suspicious, when we read about a "sublime and rational infan-
"nity*." Or, can that man be deem'd perfectly in his senses, who voluntarily publishes and avows opinions which he acts in open opposition to? A Member of Parliament, and Lord Commissioner of Trade, will never perform the duties of either, if he regards patriotism as a vice, and com-

* P. 35.

merce as "the little, wretched, in-
 "quitous business of the world in-
 "compatible *" with true religion.
 Surely, that system of ethics, which
 may be collected from the New Testa-
 ment, gives no licence to receive the
 wages of *iniquity* for neglecting a
 trust; and our author assures us, that,
 "without a previous detachment from
 "the business of this world, we can-
 "not be prepared for the happiness
 "of another †." How then will he
 justify his conduct? Will he infi-
 nue, that his employments require
 but "a moderate degree of attention"
 "and care‡?" May not this plea also
 be reckoned among "the evasions of

* P. 141.

† P. 86.

‡ P. 85.

"those

“those good managers, who choose
 “to take a little of this world in their
 “way to Heaven *?” Such incon-
 sistencies between the writer’s con-
 duct and his work, and between dif-
 ferent parts of it when compared to-
 gether, have brought an imputation
 of insincerity upon the whole; which
 if he wishes effectually to remove, he
 must do it by vacating his seat in
 Parliament, and resigning his office.
 His real intention in writing the *View*,
 no mortal, except he that wrote it,
 can absolutely ascertain; yet, suppo-
 sing the generality of his readers to
 be satisfied with its plain literal sense,
 this circumstance alone will apologize

* P. 137.

for an answer. Poison in the minds of the people requires an antidote, by whatever method it was conveyed there. For my own part, being thoroughly convinced of an evil tendency in the passages here considered, I thought it very immaterial, whether the composition was merely ironical, or proceeded from the delirium of a superannuated understanding.



F I N I S.